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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to provide magazine journalism educators with an update on current trends in the field of company publications. The first part of the paper outlines the development and growth of company publications, traces the evolution of the traditional goals and objectives for them, and illustrates how these goals and objectives have begun to change in the last few years. The second part offers a structural model that can be used both by professionals in practical situations to help solve communication problems and by educators to develop research strategies that will investigate and test many of the new concepts in the business communication field. (FL)

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REDEFINING THE ROLE OF THE COMPANY MAGAZINE, ADDING MEASUREMENT AND MANAGEMENT

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Introduction

It is clear that there is a surge of interest in company magazines and other specialized publications among journalism students and educators. There are a number of reasons for this interest, not the least of which is the fact that students are finding tremendous opportunities for internships and permanent employment in the field of business communication.

As a result of this increased interest, journalism schools are modifying existing courses and creating new ones in order to provide students with both the theoretical and practical knowledge necessary for success in the business communication world.

Unfortunately, many of us as magazine journalism educators may be behind the times in our perceptions of the role that company publications are playing in the contemporary corporate structure. This is understandable. The rapid changes that have taken place in the business communication field are only now beginning to have an impact on journalism education. Fortunately, the professionals in the field are anxious to work with journalism educators to update curriculum offerings and improve the quality of business communication instruction. The relationship that is being established between the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) and various divisions of the Association for Education in Journalism (AEJ) is a good example of this cooperation.

The purpose of this paper, then, is to provide magazine journalism educators with an update on current trends in the field of company

publications. The paper is divided into two parts. The first briefly outlines the development and growth of company publications, traces the evolution of the traditional goals and objectives for company publications, and illustrates how these have begun to change dramatically in the last few years. The second part of the paper offers a structural model that, it is hoped, can be used in several ways. First, it can be used by professionals in a practical situation to help solve communication problems. Second, it can be used by educators to develop research strategies that will investigate and test many of the new concepts in the business communication field.

PART I

The Growth and Development of Company Publications

Company publications have a long history in this country. The first company magazine was started nearly 150 years ago for Lowell Cotton Mills' female employees in Lowell, Massachusetts. The first true employee publication was founded nearly 100 years ago by the Massey Manufacturing Company, now Massey-Ferguson.[1] But, as with other forms of contemporary media, it has been in the last forty years that these publications have increased in number; recently there has been a substantial growth in new corporate publications.

The decade of the 1940s is particularly important in the history of company publications. As Baird and Turnbull point out, during World War

II it was believed that company publications were effective in helping increase industrial output in order to help win the war. Governmental agencies recommended to industrial officials that they create company publications to help educate employees on how to eliminate waste, prevent accidents and increase production. After the war, company publications became a permanent fixture in the industrial world. By the end of the decade one survey showed that there were nearly 6,000 company publications. Also, it was during this time period that a number of professional associations for company and industrial publication editors were formed.[2]

This growth continued during the 1950s and 1960s. One estimate in 1956 placed the number of company publications at 9,000.[3] In 1969 that figure had nearly doubled to 17,000.[4] Today, no one knows the exact number of company publications in existence, but the best estimate of officials at the International Association of Business Communicators puts the figure somewhere between 30,000 and 50,000.[5]

If past trends are any indication, nearly two-thirds of these publications are internal, or employee, publications. As Bateman makes clear, while the employee's right to know about company policies and issues has been clearly established over the last half century, the way companies have chosen to communicate through their publications has fluctuated.[6] Bateman cites specific corporate communication patterns identified by Dover[7] that parallel the rapid growth of company publications since 1940.

According to Dover's classification, in general, during the 1940s the emphasis was on "entertainment" in company employee publications. The

strategy was to represent the company as a nice place to work. In doing so, Bateman maintains that the company assumed that the employee was "shallow." During the 1950s, Dover says that companies shifted their strategy from one of providing entertainment to one of "informing" their employees through company publications. This strategy, which involves a more realistic way of thinking about the employee, assumes that the company's best interests could be served by meeting the information needs of the employees. Dover says the 1960s was decade of "persuasion." After establishing an information base, many firms went one step further and attempted to interpret the information and persuade the employee to adopt a specific stance.

It's probably too soon to categorize the decade of the 1970s, but it may be, as the information in this paper suggests, that the decade of the 1970s is going to be classified as the "management" decade. In other words, a period when companies began to integrate their publication effort (both internal and external) into the primary effort of the organization--that of manufacturing a product or providing a service.

Traditional Objectives of the Company Publication

Since the beginning of the growth period for company publications in the 1940s, professionals have been concerned with the specific objectives these publications are designed to fulfill. It is interesting to observe how consistent the traditional objectives have been during the last 35 years. In essence, company publications, particularly employee publications, have been considered tools to support rather than implement the primary objectives of the company or organization. Furthermore, the support these publications have provided traditionally has been considered indirect rather than direct, and as such, not considered measurable.

This non-measurable supportive role for company publications is evident from the lists of "model" objectives that have been promoted during this time period. For instance, in 1945 Bikien and Breth said that the major goal of the employee publication should be to "humanize the business to the employee." The editor was to do this by writing articles that would "introduce the management to the employee," "help integrate departments within the company," and "recognize individual and group accomplishments."[8] Significantly, they also said, "Like a great many other industrial-relations activities, employee publications will pay their way and return the cost a hundredfold or more, even though the return is indirect and not possible to measure."[9] (emphasis added) Throughout their discussion, Bikien and Breth clearly separate "management" from those who are responsible for producing the publication. The editor's function is to assist management in carrying out more important objectives.

Similarly, in the early 1950s Bentley said that an internal publication should be planned with four purposes in mind: "(1) As the company's mouthpiece, it explains and interprets company policies simply, fully, reasonably, thus making them understood and creating a desire to cooperate with them. (2) The employee paper builds morale, preventing friction among departments and individuals. (3) Since every comprehensive employee relations program has social and recreational angles, the employee paper is a spark plug. (4) It encourages personal ambition by recognizing and publicizing promotions and good performances."[10]

Reflecting a major concern in the early 1950s, Bentley also said that a primary objective of the company publication was to fight communism. "The company publication is a valuable weapon against communism. It is the

medium with the most comprehensive circulation among those the communists are trying hardest to influence. Through the company paper, the communist lie can be fought most effectively with the one certain weapon--truth."[11]

He adds that "Company publications, and their editors, actively combat communism every time they emphasize and illustrate: (1) The high American standard of living, secured by our wage rates, as a result of which workers accumulate personal property of their own choosing, and share in the benefits and luxuries of modern life; (2) The opportunities inherent in American industry for individuals to better themselves by their own efforts; (3) The rewards given to the individual for loyality, efficiency, and initiative within his own company; and (4) The true democracy and freedom from prejudice existing in most industries today, where an individual is liked or judged on the basis of his own performance."[12]

In the 1960s the suggested objectives for company publications were no less general. At the first part of the decade Halley suggested that the purpose of employee publications is to achieve such objectives as "to build the individual's pride in, and identification with, this organization," "to build understanding of the nature, problems, and needs of the organization," "to increase understanding of the role and function of the individual within the organization," and "build participation in those activities which improve the organization's efficiency and effectiveness."[13]

Baird and Turnbull, at about the same time, suggested that the objectives of an employee publication were to: "inform employees of company policies," "explain and interpret these policies," "develop employee's pride in his job and his company," "develop loyality to the company," "humanize management," "eliminate waste of materials and time," "promote social and

recreational activities," "recognize and acknowledge accomplishments of individuals and groups," "educate the employee in such matters as health, safety, and personal finance," and "interpret economics and politics."[14]

Things had not changed much by the end of the decade as the objectives suggested by Ford for company publications illustrates.[15]

Even at the beginning of the 1970s Click and Baird report a list of common objectives for company publications that seemed unchanged from those promoted 25-30 years ago. These were: "informing employees of company news and policies," "explaining and interpreting company policies in terms of the employee and his interests," "developing the employee's pride in his job and his company," "developing loyalty to the company," and "helping to improve the company's efficiency and cut down on waste materials and time."[16]

But most importantly, just as Bikien and Breth were saying in 1945, professionals in the early 1970s were saying that any effect of company publications is indirect at best and that "the magazine should not claim credit for just any improvement in the problem area in question unless it has some ways of substantiating its claims."[17] And for the most part the modern editor has few ways of supporting the work he or she is doing!

Looking at the list of objectives for company publications that have been promoted between 1945 and 1975, it is easy to get the impression that not much has changed. There is no question that the lists of objectives contain very worthy goals. However, the lists of objectives sound more like lists of "should dos" rather than a list of "can dos." Even so, those who have been responsible for developing such model goals and objectives should not be faulted. If the traditional goals and objectives of company

publications seem rather vague and general, it is a function of the fact that the field only recently entered adolescence. And, as will be pointed out below, the mark of maturity in the company publications field is evident from the fact that those responsible for company publications are beginning to measure the "should do" to see if they really "can do."

The Introduction of Measurement and Management

Most people would agree that is fun to open time capsules. And, in many ways, that's just what C.J. Dover's manual, Effective Communication in Company Publications, is--a time capsule.[18] Dover, a communications consultant for General Electric, wrote the manual 20 years ago in 1959. At the end of the publication he made ten predictions about the future of company publications that are fun to read today because of the speculation they evoke as to whether they have come true. Some are easy. For instance, Dover predicted that the two leading company editor's associations--the American Association of Industrial Editors and the International Council of Industrial Editors--would inevitably merge. Ten years later, in 1969, the two groups agreed to merge and the International Association of Business Communicators was formed in 1970.

The outcome of several of Dover's other predictions are not quite as clear cut. But for three in particular, if we can't say that they have completely come true, at least we can say that they are well on their way to being fulfilled. These predictions are:

1. The publication will gain increasing recognition and use as a key tool of management.

2. More publications will have written objectives.

3. There will be more frequent use of evaluation techniques as measures of publication effectiveness.

In his rationale for offering these predictions, Dover noted that publications would become important management tools because of the recognition by management that communication can be a powerful force for motivating people.

As for the nature of objectives, Dover believed two things would begin to take place in the field. First, more companies would begin to develop written objectives that would provide specific editorial guidance to editors and writers. He believed this would come about because of the increasing emphasis that managers were placing on written objectives as a part of the total business enterprise. Second, he predicted that company publication objectives would become less abstract and general and become much more specific in nature. As noted earlier in this paper, the traditional objectives for company publications (even when written) were most likely to be very vague and general--almost bordering on platitudes.

Perhaps Dover's most important prediction was his third one--that there would be greater use of evaluation techniques as measures of publication effectiveness. Dover recognized that the end result of the maturation process for company publications would be the measurement of results. He believed that measurement of results would naturally follow two other trends--the trend toward greater specificity in publication objectives and the trend toward greater sophistication in social science techniques

that could be used to collect the data necessary for evaluation.

As noted earlier, if we can't say that these predictions have come true, we can at least say they are on their way to being fulfilled. This is because the measurement process that Dover predicted is not restricted to the field of company publications, but has spread to all phases of company and industrial public relations, of which company publications are just a part.

This last point is illustrated by a story that Robert K. Marker, the manager of Press Services in Armstrong Cork's Advertising and Marketing Services Department, tells about his introduction to the concept of measurement. Several years ago Marker was called on by a marketing executive to explain just what Armstrong was getting for the money it was spending on public relations. Marker assembled all his press clippings and took them to the executive's office and explained how all of those column inches would stretch from one end of the building to the other. Marker says,

> . . .when I told the guy this, I could see that he was impressed.
>
> "I had no idea you fellows were generating all this press coverage for us," he said, looking appreciative. I leaned back in my chair, feeling confident that the day was won.
>
> And then it came, the question no one had ever asked before: "But what's all this worth to us?"
>
> I stammered for a moment and said something to the effect that I thought the material spoke for itself. After all, this was highly coveted editorial space we were talking about, chock full of credibility and dripping with third-party endorsement. I said it would be difficult to attach a specific value to it.
>
> He smiled. "My boy," he said, "I have to attach a value to everything in this operation, or else I'm not doing my job. Why don't you go back and write me a memo outlining clearly what this function does for us, and then we'll talk about your operating budget for next year."[19]

Marker says that first memo was a pretty hard one to write, but that today his department is in much better shape to provide feedback on performance because they break down their departmental objectives into specific increments that can be measured.

One of the leaders in applying this process to company publications is American Telephone & Telegraph Co. With nearly a million employees and more than 200 publications, the Bell System spends about $6 million on internal communication each year. Understandably, they want to know what they are getting for their money. Consequently, very specific objectives, that relate to an overall measure of "efficiency," have been set for each of their publications. James F. Tirone, Public Relations Director for AT&T, says that the evaluation process used by the Bell System last year "declares what the company expects the employee publication to do at a minimum; reach all employees, create awareness, establish a reputation for reliability, be written so the material can be understood, and be readable at an educational level appropriate to the audience."[20]

The difference between these objectives and those "traditional" objectives of company publications outlined earlier, is that AT&T has operationally defined them and utilized a variety of measurement techniques (content analysis, readership surveys, attitude studies) to determine whether the objectives have been met. In essence, they know if they are getting their money's worth.

O'Malley does a good job of summing up the need for company publication editors to be concerned with the bottom line in this new era of accountability in the corporate world. He says, "The earnings--

and therefore the customers and users--of the sponsoring organization are charged for these publications. In setting its budget, management has allocated dollars to communication activity, dollars that other units or functions--research, product development, personnel--probably have sought for their own uses."[21]

He adds, "Communication is an element--one element--in an organism fueled by money. If it does not advance the ultimate purposes of that organism, if it is principally an ornament rather than a function, it is depending upon others for its support without making an adequate return. That's one definition of a parasite."[22]

What Dover, Marker, Tirone and O'Malley are saying is that the time has arrived when company publications must make a direct, rather than indirect, contribution to the organization through the achievement of communication and non-communication related objectives. In essence, those who are responsible for producing company publications are being required to not only justify their existence, but also to predict in advance just what their publication's contribution to the organization will be in the next fiscal year--and that's a management function.

This subtle, but very important, shift in the role of the company publication editor has only begun to gather steam during the last few years. The shift is documented in the IABC surveys. Irene Piraino, research director for IABC, recently compared the results of the 1977 survey with the 1970 survey. She reports that "Probably the most profound change has been the acceptance of communication as a management function--and the communicator's evolution from editor to communication manager.

In 1970, 60 percent of the communicators polled had the title of 'editor' and only 8 percent were called managers or directors--and that 8 percent included personnel and marketing managers. Compare that with the 1977 figures: 31 percent--that's almost a third--of IABC members had 'manager' or 'director' titles. . . and the number of editors dropped to 26 percent."[23]

She adds, "The big push for managerial titles is not just an exercise in name-calling, but represents a major shift in the communicator's role--from the one-dimensional passive reporter of information to a more active professional who helps solve long-range organizational problems.

"As a manager who contributes to the organization, you're less likely to be victimized by budget cuts than an editor whom top management may see as performing a nice-but-not-quite necessary function."[24]

Assuming management duties not only means greater responsibility but also greater risk. In the contemporary corporate world, management means measurement of goals and objectives that are consistent with those of other departments and units within the organization and which are designed to have a direct effect on the primary mission of the organization. There is always the chance that the company publication won't be able to achieve those objectives. If it can't, either the editor or the publication (or both) may be eliminated. The business world, however, is willing to pay more for those who assume responsibility and risk. The 1977 IABC membership survey showed that those communicators with management duties had salaries that were almost a third higher than non-managers.

While the leaders in the field of company publications have definitely moved into an era of measurement and management, there is some evidence that the "rest of the pack" have a long way to go.

Not long ago Darrow noted that "management by objectives" was a rapidly spreading management plan that had been adopted by many organizations. He reasoned that as part of the management team the business communicator ought to be assisting management in the achievement of organizational goals by providing material consistent with these goals in the company publications. Consequently, he surveyed company publication editors to determine their awareness of the need for objectives and the extent to which they may be helping achieve organizational goals.

He found that a "majority of respondents do recognize the need for setting clear cut objectives for the publication, and periodically reviewing those objectives to make sure such goals fit the needs of the organization." However, he also noted that very few "gave any indication of any measurement or study of the publication to test whether the objectives were being fulfilled."[25]

In spite of some progress in this area, Darrow concluded that "business communicators have quite some distance to go in convincing their managements that the editor is part of the management team. Many business communicators display a highly professional attitude, with several reportedly establishing publication goals after they took their present jobs. Others, however, appear to be living in some kind of naive belief that they are somehow entitled to do their thing with no need for accountability to management. Such editors may find themselves and their publications suddenly eliminated as an operation of no consequence because it contributes little if anything to company goals."[26]

There is even some doubt among members of top management that communication can be operationally defined and measured. Williams, reporting on a 1978 IABC survey of chief executives and presidents of 50 major US and Canadian corporations, says "even though the walls of mahogany beckon invitingly, many chief executives still doubt that communication should (or can) be formalized to the extent, say, of accounting or data processing or marketing, the more traditional management functions. The communicators' toes may be holding the doors open, but they seem to be barefooted. . . and vulnerable to being stepped on."[27]

Part of the problems that communicators are facing in trying to make the adjustment to new concepts in management thinking may be due to the background of the communicators. Haynes,[28] in a comment on the need for planning in communication programs, says that in his work with top management and communicators he often finds two very different kinds of people--neither seemingly able to understand the other.

He points out that management personnel most often come from the ranks of finance, accounting, law and engineering where they have been taught and trained to excell in literal thinking. Communicators, on the other hand, generally have backgrounds that include journalism, public relations, history, government and English--training that equips them to deal with abstract ideas, philosophies and social values. Haynes says that it is no surprise that managers and communicators often don't speak the same language--they never have been trained to do so.

The solution to this problem may be to try and develop a structure where both managers and communicators can work together in the new reality of "measurement and management" in company publications. The next section of this paper provides such a framework.

PART II

A Model for Structuring Employee Communications In Diverse Multi-Divisional Corporations

If corporate communications are to be effective and if their usefulness is to be maximized, the placement of the function within the organization becomes very important. The growth and development of company publications points to a maturation process that reveals the old approach of simply hiring an editor and placing him or her in an out of the way corner of the organization will not work in the future.

Noting the evolution of employee communications and recognizing the need to make it an integral part of management activities, a structural model developed by Bateman becomes useful for introducing and implementing both management and measurement into the company communication progress.[29] (See Figure 1.) The model is applicable for many kinds and sizes of organizations, but it was originally designed for multi-divisional corporations. (See Figure 2.) The model is currently being implemented and analyzed in Fortune 500-type firms.

In multi-divisional corporations, how can the Office of the Chief Executive effectively transmit messages to thousands of employees that are "housed" in numerous dissimilar divisions? The divisions may: (1) make different products, (2) be located in different areas, and (3) have joined the corporation via different routes. That is, Division 6 may have been in the organization for twenty years; division twenty may have just been acquired within the past six months.

This type of organization generally has a corporate employee publication that is distributed to all employees. Each division may also attempt to communicate with its employees. Unless coordinated, there is potential for contradictory messages, late information and different interpretations of the "same" data.

The Structure: Its Elements

Failures in effective employee communications in this type of organization have evolved for various reasons. However, the most frequent reason is the failure of top management to: (a) get actively involved in identifying the need for effective communications, (b) specify what is to be communicated, and then (c) add their implicit power-prestige to the effort. Too often companies have gotten momentarily enthused about employee communications--the president produces a "white paper," the communication task is assigned to some obsecure person or unit and then rapidly forgotten. Everyone is initially serious and concerned. But, no one at the top gives the communication effort the consistent emphasis it needs. By its very nature, employee communication can become obsecure in the organization. Communication is not effective if spasmodic--it needs a continual solid push. The proposed structure directly addresses these problems and develops a means for effective delivery. (See Figure 1.)

Communication Policy Board.--Central to the proposed structure is the Communication Policy Board. This is not just another committee; it is a group which directly involves the Office of the Chief Executive in the communication process. The Board would generally consist of: the president, executive vice president, selected operating vice president, the vice president of personnel (if the

communication function is in the personnel area) and one ex officio member--the manager of employee communications. The Board sets the tone and broadly determines the substance for the organization's communications. The Board's responsibilities include:

--Establishing Long-Term Communication Goals. The Board must look ahead, see future problems and determine how to relate them to employees. Just as the corporation establishes long-term goals in its marketing efforts, its product development strategies and its manpower planning, the corporation (vis-a-vis the Board) must establish long-term communication goals.

--Setting Annual Communication Objectives. The term "communication" is very general. However, the annual communication objectives must be most explicit in specifying what the firm wants to accomplish. As with profit and marketing objectives, the communication objectives should be explicit, realistic and include a date for accomplishment. Obviously, each organization must analyze its current situation and future direction, but some sample communication objectives could be:

1. Because 75% of the hourly employees think the firm's annual profits exceed 50%, and only 7% of the employees recognize that our profits amount to about 4% on sales, reduce the "75%" figure to 50% and increase the "7%" figure to 15% by (date).

2. Whereas the firm makes 20 identifiable products and because on the average nonexempt employees can only name 3 products the company manufactures, increase that "average understanding" of being able to name what the company makes to 6 products by (date).

3. Although 80% of the spouses of our male employees read our firm's monthly magazine, only 5% of the spouses of our female employees read the magazine. Increase the readership of our magazine among the spouses of our female employees to 15% by (date).

--Evaluating the Communication Activity. The Board is concerned with the what. That is, the Board identifies management's message and clearly determines what needs to be communicated and what should be communicated to employees. They key to the entire system is feedback measurement and evaluation. Having established the communication goals, it is then possible to measure the effectiveness of the organization in achieving its goals. Those evaluations and feedback items are authorized by and reported to the Communication Policy Board. Specific measurement tools are not described here. But, in general, a number of established social science techniques (such as content analysis, readability surveys and attitude studies) are used to gather the information necessary for evaluation.

Feedback.--Initially, some may criticize the model for it is--at first glance--a top-down communication flow. Top management has ideas, determines what is to be communicated and then directs the personnel in the communication arena to follow through on the objectives. However, as actually implemented the model allows for the best of all possible worlds. First, top management is permitted to indicate what they feel should be communicated to employees. If top management is doing its job, they should be looking into the future. They have the opportunity to identify potential problems and communicate those to employees. For example, how inflation will potentially reduce company sales; how the creation of new tariffs in certain foreign countries may reduce exports; how increased social security benefits and OSHA regulations are forcing the company to replace employees with machines. The point is, top management has the opportunity to identify information that is important to an employee that the employee would be completely unaware of.

On the other hand, top managements are notorious for becoming isolated and out of touch with the employee. The various feedback cycles noted in the model aggressively and continuously tune-in to the employee and attempt to determine what is on the employees' mind--what do employees what to know? In this way the model fosters upward communication and gets results.

The feedback loop in the model formalizes a natural process which D'Aprix[30] and Drucker[31] believe will almost automatically take place. However, it is very necessary to specify employee feedback in the corporate structure of things or there is a danger that the "natural process" may be short circuited by inattentive and "out of tune" executives.

Drucker maintains that the recipients of the communication (in this case the employees) really "control the communication process."[32] He contends that

it is the employees' perceptions that really count. Therefore, "any kind of communication that does not take into account the value changes of the recipients will be seen by them as irrelevant and quaint."[33] The model for structuring employee communications intrinsically builds on an approach for keeping close tabs on employee value changes and other real and perceived changes in the employee audience.[34]

The feedback data are collected at all points in the scheme (management attitudes, communication manager ideas, coordinator perceptions and employee concerns). The data are then analyzed at all points as they are pushed up and through the system. In a very real sense this means that the Communication Policy Board is not working in isolation. It has reliable information about company communications that has been collected from employees, communication coordinators, the communication manager and top line managers.

This approach is much different from the typical way of determining what to communicate to employees. The old way set an editor in the corner and had the editor produce a pretty magazine; the magazine was probably produced to only make top management pleased. Now, the employees are "in the spotlight." What they want and need to know is the primary criterion for determining the communication mix.

The Communication Department.--In most organizations the personnel responsible for employee communications are directly involved in determining both the "what" and the "how." Generally a staff of communicators is forced to continually attempt to think of ideas that might be related to employees. The focus is on the next edition of the newsletter or magazine.

The structure as presented in the model clearly centralizes the communication personnel into a department with a direct line relationship to the Communication Policy Board. The Department will be provided with the "what." The communicators, then, are permitted to pursue what they are trained to do--determine the best ways of delivering the substantive information. In other words, with the communication personnel relieved from having to fish for the "what," they can concentrate on the "how." The communication department responsibilities include:

--Implementing the Communication Objectives. The implementation involves actualizing the specific objectives and determining alternative media for delivering the information. Another function is to take the corporate objectives and place them in suitable terminology for the diverse corporate audience.

--Coordinating the Multi-Divisions. Diverse divisions are each going to have their peculiarities, problems and established ways of communicating to employees. Some are going to have newspapers, others bulletin boards. Some will emphasize employee meetings and others video tapes. The role of the communication department is not to dictate how the isolated division in Portland, Maine or Seattle, Washington is supposed to communicate to their constituency. However, having agreed on the communication objectives, the department can provide a large measure of options for the local division.

--Upgrading and Assisting the Divisions. The communication personnel at the isolated divisions will generally be untrained and unsophisticated. Therefore, the communication department can aid substantially in upgrading the divisions' personnel and providing divisions with materials that are easily usable.

--Translating and Monitoring Division Activities. The department can aid the divisions in translating how the corporate objectives specifically relate to their situation. Also, they can aid the divisions in monitoring the success and weakness of the local communication efforts.

Division Coordinators.--As previously indicated, the personnel placed in charge of communication at the various plant locations are often not trained in communication techniques. With the active support of the communication department

the coordinator can develop meaningful delivery systems for dissemination of company information to local employees. The coordinators' responsibilities include:

--Developing Workable Techniques of Delivery. It is fine to consider all the possible sophisticated techniques for moving information from the company headquarters to Ms. employee in Oshkosh. But, the resources at Oshkosh may be limited by time, experience, conflicts and funds. Within that framework the Coordinator selects the most feasible means of communicating. It must be emphasized that if the communication department is doing its job, much of the Coordinator's job will consist of "cutting and pasting." It is not assumed that the Coordinator is an experienced journalist creating heavy copy at the local scene.

--Linking the Corporation with Employees. By taking the materials provided by the communication department and relating them to local affairs, it is possible to link the "distant" corporate communication objective with the individual employee at the isolated division. For instance, a corporate communication objective might be to increase the employees' knowledge of the company's products. This can be emphasized both by the corporate communication department and the division Coordinator. The department prepares copy concerning company products that can be used by all the divisions and the Coordinator emphasizes local products in the division's communications.

--Providing Consistency in the Employee Message. Recognizing the peculiar communication needs of the local employee, the coordinator can relate a consistent message to employees. It would be virtually impossible for a corporate staff to specifically "tune in" to employees within the multi-divisions. For instance, in a product-diverse corporation it is reasonable to assume that at different times the different divisions will be performing at different levels of profitability. A communication objective of the Policy Board may be to keep employees well informed concerning business activity and profitability. The total corporation may be doing exceedingly well. A recent report in the corporate employee magazine headlines--"Corporate Profits At An All-Time High." However, the particular product and profitability at a single location may be in a severe slump. The Coordinator is to insure that accurate information is provided local employees concerning their specific situation. It is counter to this system and to good management for the employee to read the "High Profit" headline on Friday morning and be mysteriously laid off Friday afternoon. The Coordinator would consistently be providing local interpretations on the corporate message. This would reduce the potential of the local employee being misled.

The intent of the structure is to provide the employee with needed information to insure that the employee has an opportunity to receive management's ideas. There are two basic targets--top management and the employees. The structure forces management to identify what is to be communicated and then links that message to the employee.

As the model is explored it becomes clear that there are several options for determining which vice presidential arena should encompass employee communications. Some corporations are comfortable to have it placed within the jurisdiction of a Personnel V.P. because of the direct personnel line throughout the corporation. Others, because communication technicians are often already in Public Affairs, prefer to place the activity under a Public Affairs or Public Relations V.P. Where the technicians are placed maybe a relatively minor point. The major aspect is that top management is determining what is to be communicated.

The Structure: Its Advantages

Top Management Involvement.--The Communication Policy Board clearly gets the corporation's top management actively involved in the communication activity. They establish the communication objectives; the responsibility for determining the corporate message is placed where it belongs--on the managers who really know what is going on.

In the past, companies have generated considerable initial interest in employee communications. But, the desire to communicate has often quickly diminished when the responsibility for the effort was placed at some low point in the organization. This system makes top management THINK COMMUNICATION.

With top management meeting several times a year to determine communication directions and to evaluate the previous efforts, it becomes much harder for the system to breakdown.

Takes Employee Communication Out of the Soft Arena.--For years the communication task within organizations has been a "soft" area. Communicate with employees because: it is nice," it is "socially acceptable," or because it fosters better "human relations." As noted earlier, employee communications have not generally been subject to scrutiny or evaluation. On the other hand, the "hard" areas like manufacturing, finance and accounting have had to meet corporate requisites. The proposed structure establishes objectives and is a major step in taking employee communications out of the "its the nice thing to do" domain and placing it in a system with the traditionally "hard" viable company functions.

Creates an Assistance Mode for Divisions.--Whereas in the past divisions have been expected to somehow communicate, they lacked expertise and direction. The proposed structure provides good communication techniques and clear objectives within a positive framework.

Often, the employee communication activity falls within the personnel area--especially at the isolated locations. The Personnel Manager at the local level is often inundated with urgent duties--hiring, counseling, union relations, safety, affirmative action, and yes, communications. Unfortunately, often communication is the last activity--the one that is often placed on the back burner.

The proposed structure adds emphasis to employee communications, provides usable materials, and adds measurable attributes to the communication activity.

The system does not permit employee communications to grow moldy from inattention. At the division level Personnel Managers are intellectually committed to the idea of employee communications. But, they do not have the tools or time to implement the necessary procedures. The proposed system provides the division with the "nuts and bolts" assistance they need.

Provides a Framework for Evaluation.--As with production, finance and advertising the employee communications activity must be evaluated. The proposed system clearly establishes precise communication objectives, establishes the responsibility for delivery and provides for measurement and evaluation. Through a variety of social science techniques it is possible to determine if the corporation is having any success in achieving the objectives the company (the Communication Policy Board) has established.

The Managerial Implications

For too long corporations have communicated because it was supposedly socially acceptable; that is no longer justified or reasonable. It is time to take employee communications out of the "marshmellow" stage and start to move the function into the main-line of management decision making and evaluation.

If the next frontier that management must conquer is truly employee communications, then alternative structures, rekindled emphasis, and new techniques of evaluation will need to be implemented. This proposed structure is certainly not the definitive answer. But, it establishes a context for isolating the crucial parts that make up an employee communication system. Having identified the basic elements for good employee communications it will now be possible to hone a more workable and practical model.

FIGURE 1

A SUGGESTED STRUCTURE FOR EMPLOYEE COMMUNICATIONS
IN A MULTI-DIVISIONAL CORPORATION

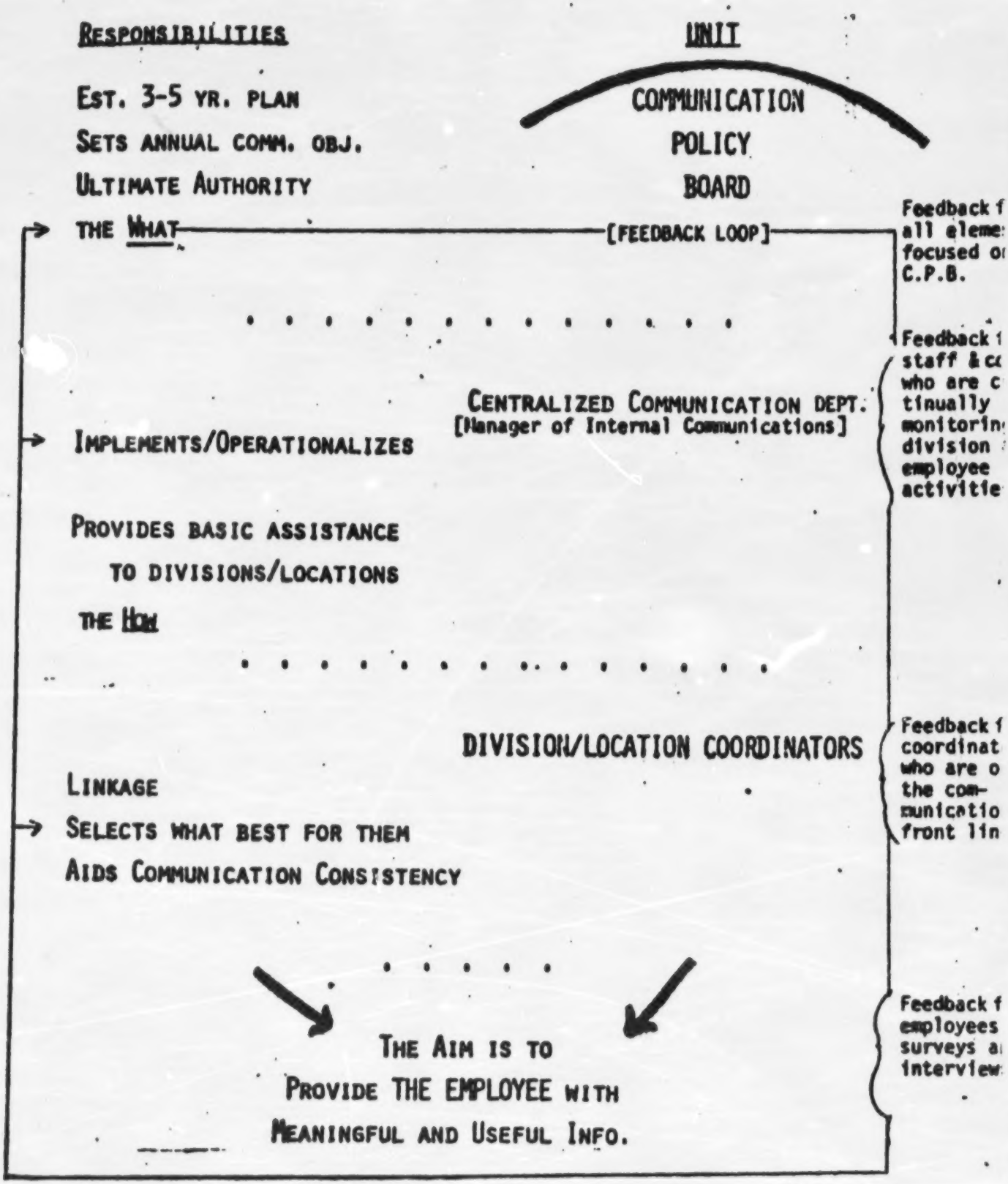
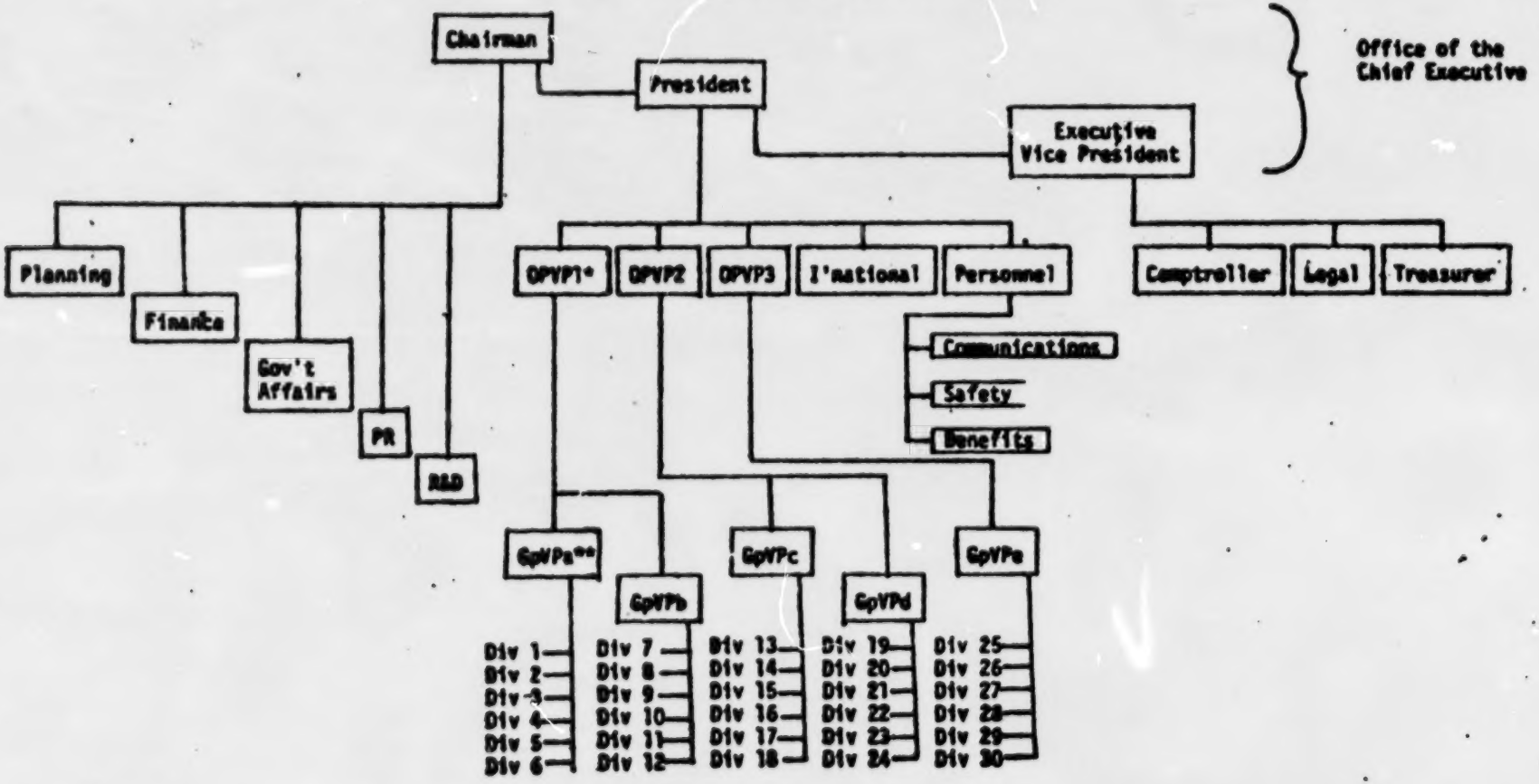


FIGURE 2

TYPICAL COMPLEX MULTI-DIVISIONAL ORGANIZATION



*Operating Vice President
**Group Vice President

FOOTNOTES

[1]J. W. Click and Russell N. Baird, Magazine Editing and Production (Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown Company, 1974), p. 35.

[2]Russell N. Baird and A.T. Turnbull, Industrial and Business Journalism (Philadelphia, Penn.: Chilton Company, 1961), pp. 19-25

[3]Ibid.

[4]James L. C. Ford, Magazines for Millions (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969), p. 82.

[5]Irene Piraino, Research Director, International Association of Business Communicators, telephone interview March 22, 1979.

[6]David N. Bateman, "The Employees' Right To Know The Issues And The Corporations' Responsibility To Communicate," The Journal of Business Communication, 14:2 (Winter, 1977) pp. 3-9.

[7]C. J. Dover, "The Three Eras of Management Communication," Business and Industrial Communication: A Source Book, ed. by W. Charles Redding and George A. Sanborn (New York: Harper and Row, 1964) pp. 51-65.

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[9]Ibid. p.6

[10]Garth Bentley, Editing the Company Publication, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953) pp. 3-4.

[11]Ibid. p. 11

[12]Ibid. p. 13

[13]William C. Halley, Employee Publications (Chilton Co., 1960). Selected and reprinted by the International Association of Business Communicators, 870 Market Street, Suite 928, San Francisco, CA 94102.

[14]Baird and Turnbull, Industrial and Business Journalism pp. 38-39.

[15]Ford, Magazines for Millions, p. 99.

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[17]Ibid.

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[19]Robert K. Marker, "The Armstrong/PR Data Measurement System," Public Relations Review III, No. 4 (Winter, 1977) p. 52.

[20]James F. Tirone, "Measuring The Bell System's Public Relations," Public Relations Review III, No. 4 (Winter, 1977) p. 31.

[21]Michael O'Malley, "Curing the Quarter Horse and Beer Can Syndrome," Journal of Organizational Communication, 1976, No. 4, p. 12.

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[23]Irene Piraino, untitled speech to the South Bay Chapter, International Association of Business Communicators, Nov. 16, 1978.

[24]Ibid.

[25]Ralph C. Darrow, "MBO By Industrial Editors," (paper presented to the Magazine Division Association for Education in Journalism, Madison, Wisconsin, August, 1977).

[26]Ibid.

[27]Louis C. Williams, Jr., "And Now, A Message From Our Sponsors. . .," Journal of Organizational Communication, 1978, No. 4, p. 4.

[28]Jim Haynes, "How To Win Friends and Influence Management With a Communication Game Plan," Journal of Organizational Communication, 1978, No. 2, pp. 15-17.

[29]David N. Bateman, "Structuring Employee Communications in Diverse Multidivisional Corporations," paper presented at the Midwest Business Administration Association Meetings--Management Division. Chicago, Ill., April 5, 1979.

[30]Roger M. D'Aprix. The Believable Corporation. NY: Amacom, 1977, p. 36.

[31]Peter Drucker. Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices. NY: Harper and Row, 1974. 490-493.

[32]Ibid., p. 490

[33]Ibid., p. 492.

[34]Some corporations are now simultaneously tapping the employees values, attitudes, satisfaction and feelings about communication and topics. These data are carefully collected and used by the communication manager to determine the kinds of topics that interest employees and should be included in the company's communication efforts.